

Women in Manufacturing

Meet Jan Steiner, Kusum Kavia, Judy Lopez, and Marjorie Neilson, four women leading their manufacturing businesses. Jan Steiner is President and CEO of Thoro Packaging, an eco-friendly manufacturer specializing in the packaging of medical, pharmaceutical, and beauty products. Kusum Kavia is co-founder and president of Combustion Associates, Inc (CAI), which custom engineers and manufactures power generation and process systems to Energy, Process, and Environmental Industries in Northern America and world-wide. Judy Lopez's company Microdyne Plastics manufactures custom molds, including injection and blow molding. ANCO International, run by CEO Marjorie Neilson, specializes in custom design and fabrication of hardware that solves problems of connections for highly specialized hose applications. All four of these companies are based in the Inland Empire, proving that manufacturers don't have to go far away to be part of something big.

Each of these women faces obstacles in their unique lines of manufacturing. Overcoming these challenges has become a team effort. "We lead by a team of people," says Judy Lopez. "I don't assume I know it all. Engagement of people is incredibly important. Every employee has some sort of knowledge that can be gleaned or gained."

Jan Steiner believes part of her company's growth can be attributed to the wisdom and knowledge of the people involved with their company, including clients and stakeholders. "The more knowledge you have, the more you can hit the mark," she says. Leading a business means constantly learning and listening.

Marjorie Neilson's husband founded ANCO International in 1978, but when he died in 1986, Marjorie continued to work at her job at the county while working nights and weekends to keep the company going. Eventually, Marjorie was able to quit her job working for the county and fully embrace the world of manufacturing. She relied on the people in the company to help her push ANCO through the difficult time and beyond. With Marjorie and her team beside her, ANCO's products ship world-wide. They are the sole provider of jet fuel couplings on US aircraft carriers.

Without the assistance of trusted colleagues, mentors, friends, and clients, Thoro Packaging, Combustion Associates, Inc, Microdyne Plastics, and ANCO International wouldn't be the successful businesses they are today.

Being a woman in the manufacturing industry isn't always easy, but times are changing, and these women are a testament to their hard work and diligence. "Manufacturing is exciting," says Jan Steiner, who has been in the industry for over thirty years. "I know women are being received all the more and are able to take on some good careers. It's better now, and there are many more women in leadership roles today."

It takes a specific type of person to pursue a career in manufacturing. "We have a hard time finding those who want to learn, work, and produce great products," says Marjorie Neilson. Jan Steiner, whose company employs around 170 people, says, "Newcomers to the industry must have a desire to learn and grow with ambition. Coming out of college doesn't put new hires at the top." Just as business owners have to be willing to learn, so do their employees. Judy Lopez

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encourages future manufacturers to find a passion, set goals for learning, and never be afraid to ask for help. “Find a mentor and other people you can learn from in the industry,” suggests Lopez.

For Kusum, the reasons for a young woman to enter the manufacturing industry are easy to unearth: “The work is demanding, but you get to see a design on paper transformed into a product that solves problems. Along the way, there are opportunities for growth from marketing, to operations, supply chain management, accounting, design-drafting, engineering and production, quality control, customer service and inventory control. There is great satisfaction that the product you helped make was made in USA.”